

provision would ensure that a member of the military, who is married to an immigrant spouse would qualify for the stimulus rebate payment even if such spouse does not yet have a Social Security number.

This fix was necessary because in the zeal to impose anti-immigrant philosophy, language was added to the legislation for the stimulus rebate payments which now has a negative effect on some of our military and their families, even as they are off fighting a war.

This should serve as a great lesson in caution and being circumspect before we allow our deep-seated feelings to get the best of us.

We must learn from these lessons even as we fight to improve the lives of those who fight for our country through improved GI education benefits, pay increase, better health care services, and increased disability benefits.

This bill has been a labor of love. We passed a very similar bill (H.R. 3997) 410–0 on December 18, 2009, and had hoped to get it signed into law before the end of last year. Yet, despite the total bipartisan nature of this bill, we were unable to get it to the President's desk before the end of December, 2007. So, here we are again. Persistent to the end.

This bill is small but means a lot to many people. The Committee has received more calls on this bill than we could have imagined. People are calling to find out when the bill will become law.

Today gives us fresh hope—it looks like we will actually do it this time. I am proud to be a part of this small but important effort for our military men and women and their families who continue to give so much to our country.

Mr. KIND. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 6081, the Heroes Earnings Assistance and Relief Tax (HEART) Act of 2008. This bill provides a number of much needed and deserved tax benefits to members of the military, their families, and veterans. Specifically, I am proud that the Qualified Veterans' Mortgage Bonds (QVMB) program, which impacts my home State of Wisconsin, was renewed and reformed so that the dream of home ownership will continue to be a reality for thousands of veterans.

Under the HEART Act, the QVMB program will be expanded to allow \$100 million annually in tax exempt bonding for the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) State veterans home loan program—enough funding to aid about 600 State veterans in obtaining low interest rate home loans. This program is more important now than ever before with the ongoing credit crisis in this country, and I am proud we were able to expand it. In Wisconsin alone, the WDVA has made over 54,000 home loans to veterans through this program.

Other important provisions in this bill include allowing combat pay for troops to count as earned income for the Earned Income Tax Credit and making permanent the Internal Revenue Code provision that allows active duty reservists to make penalty-free withdrawals from their retirement plans.

Our military service men and women have sacrificed a great deal to protect the freedoms that we so deeply cherish in this country. Their sacrifices and extended tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, however, have placed greater economic hardships on their families here at home. The bill before us today will help alleviate some of those hardships by giving military families much needed and deserved tax relief and making permanent some of the tem-

porary provisions that Congress has previously enacted.

The HEART Act is one simple but significant way we can thank our troops for their service to our country. I thank Chairman RANGEL and Ranking Member MCCRERY for their bipartisan leadership on this legislation, and I urge my colleagues to support our men and women in the military by passing this legislation.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, today I rise in strong support of H.R. 6081, the Heroes Earnings Assistance and Relief Tax (HEART) Act of 2008. This bill provides tax relief to America's heroic servicemembers. As a veteran of the Korean war, it is imperative that we assist the brave men and women who put their lives at risk in defending our Nation in any way we can.

H.R. 6081 will improve tax benefits to members of the armed services. For example, today's legislation permanently extends the Earned Income Tax Credit for combat pay, allows for penalty-free withdrawal from servicemember pension plans, allows access for funds in Flexible Savings Accounts, and lets military death benefits to roll over into a Roth IRA or Education Savings Account. Given the crisis in the housing market, I am particularly heartened that H.R. 6081 permanently establishes mortgage bonds used to finance home purchases by veterans.

Mr. Speaker, this bill also extends the Economic Stimulus rebates that are being delivered as we speak today. H.R. 6081 humanely permits servicemembers who are married to foreigners to receive the full value of their rebate.

Lastly, the bill will restrict government contractors who move offshore to avoid paying Social Security and Medicare benefits. It is shocking that government contractors receive millions, or even billions, of taxpayer dollars and then try to avoid paying their fair share of taxes.

We have put our Nation's finest men and women in a senseless war without an end. The least we can do is allow their families to enjoy the same benefits as their neighbors. Mr. Speaker, this is a commonsense bill and I urge my colleagues to support it.

Mr. LARSON of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commend the Committee on Ways and Means for passing this important legislation, the Heroes Earnings Assistance and Tax Relief Act. This legislation brings necessary tax relief to members of our armed services, veterans and their families and it also contains important technical corrections to a law that provides tax relief to volunteer emergency first responders.

Like our men and women in the armed services, volunteer emergency first responders provide a crucial service to our communities. They are in the front lines in the case of fire, natural disaster or other emergency. The majority of these brave men and women are volunteers and give up their time out of a sense of obligation to their communities. We owe them a debt of gratitude for their service.

This technical correction clarifies that property tax rebates and other benefits that are made to volunteer emergency first responders and are excluded from gross income are not subject to Social Security tax or unemployment tax. This was the intent of the original legislation and I appreciate the opportunity to clarify this through HR. 6081, the Heroes Earnings Assistance and Tax Relief Act.

Mr. SESTAK. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the remainder of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 6081, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. SESTAK. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

#### MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A message in writing from the President of the United States was communicated to the House by Ms. Wanda Evans, one of his secretaries.

#### SENSE OF HOUSE REGARDING FOSTER PARENTS

Mr. McDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 1185) expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that Congress should recognize the important contributions of Americans who serve as foster parents and, in doing so, unselfishly open their homes and family lives to children in need.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

##### H. RES. 1185

Whereas the Nation's foster care system provides a sanctuary for children who are unable to live safely in their homes;

Whereas in 2006, some 799,000 children spent at least 24 hours in foster care and, on any given day, roughly 510,000 children were in the Nation's foster care system;

Whereas the primary goal of foster care is to ensure the safety and well-being of children while working to expeditiously provide children with a permanent, safe, and loving home;

Whereas via reunification with parents, adoption, or legal guardianship, some 289,000 children left foster care in 2006 for a permanent home;

Whereas 303,000 children entered foster care in 2006;

Whereas more than 43 percent of the children that entered foster care in 2005 were age 5 and younger;

Whereas studies have found that a child's early years are critical for his or her brain development, making it extremely important for all children to live in a safe and loving home during this critical period in their lives;

Whereas in 2005, the median age of a child in foster care was just over 10 years old and the median length of stay for a child in foster care was nearly 16 months;

Whereas while a majority of children living in foster care had the goal of being reunified with their parents, nearly 20 percent of foster children were seeking adoption in 2005;

Whereas each year as many as 24,000 teens will reach the age of 18 while in foster care

and age out of the system without finding a permanent family;

Whereas on any given day in 2006, there were as many as 129,000 children in the foster care system waiting to be adopted;

Whereas in 2005, roughly 60 percent of the children who left foster care for a permanent adoptive family were adopted by their foster parents and another 25 percent were adopted by relatives; and

Whereas it would be appropriate to designate the month of May 2008 as National Foster Care Month: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved*, That it is the sense of the United States House of Representatives that—

(1) all Americans should work together to strengthen families and reduce the need of foster care placement for children; and

(2) Congress should continue its commitment to providing critical assistance to children and families involved in the foster care system through the title IV program in the Social Security Act and other programs that are designed to help children reunite with their parents or find a loving and permanent home when they cannot return to their biological parents.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. McDERMOTT) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Washington.

Mr. McDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, every day another 850 American children enter foster care. If you go outside and walk along the Mall today, you will see cardboard cutouts of children. Another 850 representations will be added each day this week to help us all understand who are at risk and what is at stake. The fact is, most people are unaware of how many children are in foster care right now and how many more will be in foster care tomorrow. My hope is that the image of those cardboard cutouts will be so compelling that America will take and demand action.

As the chairman of the subcommittee with jurisdiction over the foster care system, I want the House to make this issue as important as the children we need to help. Each child in this Nation deserves nothing less than a safe, loving home with a caregiver who ensures their physical and emotional well-being, supports their dreams in life and helps them become healthy and happy adults. For over a half a million children in our Nation, that home is not with their biological parents. Instead, the nurturing environment is found in the homes of foster families, who temporarily support a child until that child can either be safely returned to their biological parents or moved to a permanent home.

What I just described in a few words doesn't begin to cover the heroic actions by Americans on behalf of foster children, so we are here today to mark the month of May as National Foster Care Month. It is a designation reserved for heroes, and there are hundreds of thousands of American heroes to be noticed and thanked. They are the people who open their homes and their hearts to children who are seeking sanctuary when they are no longer

able to live safely in their homes. These people are the safety net for these children, the difference between hope and disaster.

National Foster Care Month also recognizes the unsung heroes who work in the foster care system itself, these individuals who dedicate their lives to improving the well-being of children who are under the care of the State. Many of these dedicated people work for relatively little salary, with limited resources, and often face very dangerous situations. They do it because they care, and we are grateful.

There isn't anything partisan about ensuring the safety and well-being of children. We either meet our responsibility to protect these children, or we don't.

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Lives indeed hang in the balance. That is why Congress must work together to improve our Nation's foster care system and to fully support these children, including those who age out of the foster care system each year and their caretakers, which includes grandparents and other relatives. It is up to us to ensure that the educational, medical, and emotional needs of foster children are met. It is up to us to make sure they know they are not alone. In truth, their outcomes in life are linked to our ability to guarantee that the State has the resources to provide these children with the assistance they need.

Foster children should have the same opportunities in life that our other children have. It is up to us to guarantee that our Federal programs support that basic right.

I ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing May 2008 as National Foster Care Month. We salute the tireless work of foster care parents, case workers, court personnel, service providers, and advocates, many of whom are former foster children, for their commitment to supporting vulnerable children across this Nation. We must recommit ourselves to working to improve the foster care system because of the lives of innocent children who are at stake, and we have the power to make a difference.

I would like at this time to take one moment to recognize my colleague, Mr. WELLER, who has been my ranking member on this subcommittee, and he and I have worked together hand in hand on this issue. This is not a partisan issue, and it has been a real pleasure to have Mr. WELLER as my ranking member in this session of Congress. We have a bill coming which we hope this House will also approve at another time.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WELLER of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, likewise to the chairman of the subcommittee, which I have the privilege of serving as the ranking member, I just want to state that I enjoy working with you very much as well, and thank you for your compliment.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H. Res. 1185, recognizing May as National Foster Care Month. This resolution recognizes the enormous contribution of foster parents who care for so many vulnerable young people across America. And I want to commend its chief sponsors, Representative JON PORTER of Nevada and Chairman McDERMOTT, for sponsoring and introducing this important resolution.

The House is considering this resolution right between Mother's Day and Father's Day, which is appropriate, since foster parents step in to take the place of biological mothers and fathers. Taxpayers themselves contribute literally billions of dollars each year in Federal and State assistance to this important effort. But the most important part is the simple willingness of responsible adults to step in and care for kids who cannot safely remain with their own parents. For that, as this resolution expresses, the Nation says thank you.

Many other people work to support foster parents through both public and private organizations and in paid and volunteer positions alike. We express our thanks to those dedicated people as well. One example in the congressional district I represent, groups like The Baby Fold, which provides a variety of services to support biological and foster families. We thank all of these individuals for their continuing effort and dedication to improving the lives of children and their families.

In spite of all the hard work by individuals involved at all levels in the Nation's foster care system, more work is needed to ensure all children have a safe home, are protected from abuse, and have the best opportunities to lead a healthy and productive life.

The Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support, on which I serve as ranking member, has held numerous hearings in the past year on child welfare issues, reviewing whether foster children are receiving appropriate medical care, are being prescribed the right medications, are receiving the education they deserve, and are being adequately prepared for their life as adults. For some children, the answer to these questions is a "yes," but for too many the answer is "no." Too many children in foster care are behind their peers in terms of their health, education, and job prospects.

So there is still much that we need to do to ensure that all children in foster care receive the care and support they need to overcome these obstacles and thrive as young adults.

For those who cannot safely return home to their own parents, that means creating an environment providing as much love, support, and stability as possible. For some children, that may mean placement with relatives. For others, it involves the generosity and sacrifice of foster parents who step in when biological families don't work out.

In addition to this resolution, as Chairman McDERMOTT noted, he and I

are currently working on a bipartisan package of legislation that we intend to have designed to improve the foster care system: Expecting more educational stability and high school completion for foster children, improving health outcomes, keeping siblings together, and extending and improving a current incentive program that rewards States for increasing adoptions. These legislative changes would implement many of the recommendations our subcommittee has heard for improving the lives of children in foster care. But even with these improvements, the tens of thousands of dedicated foster parents and those who support them will continue to remain the backbone of our foster care system. On our Nation's effort to support children who cannot safely live with their own parents, we owe them our thanks and our continued support.

Mr. Speaker, I urge an "aye" vote for this important resolution.

I reserve the balance of my time.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MCDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H. Res. 1185.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Washington?

There was no objection.

Mr. CARDOZA. Mr. Speaker, I rise to join my colleague, Mr. MCDERMOTT, and urge the support of H. Res. 1185. Since being elected to public office, I have been in advocate for children in foster care; in part because 8 years ago my wife and I adopted two of our children from foster care.

As a result, we became intimately aware of the status of America's foster care system. This resolution commends the hard work and sacrifice of the thousands of American families who care for foster children. As an adoptive foster parent, I know the joy these children bring. I also know that caring for children who, in some cases, have survived atrocious abuse and neglect can be extremely challenging. Many foster parents open their hearts and homes to children with the trauma and pain of a broken past. Many times these caregivers receive little or no support from the Federal government as they take in our Nation's most vulnerable young people.

Despite record food prices, foster families across America stretch their budgets to feed additional children that they have welcomed into their homes. Despite rising gas prices; foster families do their best to drive children to schools, take them to doctor's appointments, and attend little league games—because they know that's the kind of support these children have never had. They do a great service for America, Mr. Speaker, and deserve to be commended for their efforts.

While we recognize and commend their service, we need to do more to ensure a better future for these children when they leave foster homes. We need to do more to heal the minds and bodies of these children, so that the investment that foster parents have made in their lives is not lost to homelessness, drug addiction, and gang involvement that so many

of these children turn to when they are abandoned again as they exit foster care.

The public may not be aware that on the night of their 18th birthday, most states terminate all services for foster children. Parents know that most children in our society are not self-sufficient the day they turn 18. For example: we don't expect our children to afford health coverage when they turn 18. In fact, most parents retain their children under a family policy until age 23. Yet for the 26,000 vulnerable young Americans who age out of the foster care system, we eliminate their healthcare coverage the moment they turn 18. Mr. Speaker, we need to do better. We need to extend healthcare coverage for children in foster care to age 21. The pathway to extend coverage already exists in current law, but only 17 states have implemented this option and I believe it is a moral and societal imperative to make this the standard across our Nation. Without proper healthcare many of these youth end up another sad statistic.

I know my good friend from Washington, Mr. MCDERMOTT, and I see eye-to-eye on this issue. Both he and I have introduced legislation that would make these necessary changes to healthcare coverage for foster children. Mr. Speaker, I urge the rest of my colleagues to support this resolution and to do better for America's foster children.

Mr. PORTER. Mr. Speaker, according to 2006 data, nationally, 799,000 children have spent at least 24 hours in foster care and, on any given day, roughly 510,000 children were in the Nation's foster care system. In Nevada, there are currently 5,450 children receiving foster care, including 3,947 in Clark County.

My district has faced some unique challenges recently. As Southern Nevadans, we recognize the need for a nurturing environment when biological parents abuse or neglect their own children. Foster families graciously open their doors, and offer love and guidance in the most difficult of circumstances. It is critical we honor these unsung heroes.

I would like to thank Chairman MCDERMOTT for introducing this bipartisan legislation honoring the selfless service of foster families recognizing the critical role these individuals play in communities across the nation. In addition, the resolution will mark May as National Foster Care Month. I encourage all of my colleagues to support the generosity of foster parents in their districts and throughout the nation during the month of May.

Mr. WELLER of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MCDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Washington (Mr. MCDERMOTT) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 1185.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Ms. Curtis, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed a bill of the

following title in which the concurrence of the House is requested:

S. 3035. An act to temporarily extend the programs under the Higher Education Act of 1965.

#### SENSE OF HOUSE REGARDING FORMER FOSTER CARE YOUTH

Mr. LEWIS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 1208) expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that youth who age out of foster care should be given special care and attention.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

#### H. RES. 1208

Whereas 12,000,000 Americans spend time in foster care;

Whereas every year, more than 24,000 youth turn age 18 while in foster care;

Whereas the safekeeping of most youth who age out of foster care is the responsibility of the State governments, which receive Federal funding to assist them in doing so;

Whereas family reunification, kinship care, and adoption are the preferred solutions for children who are placed in foster care;

Whereas Congress created a new Independent Living initiative in 1986, and expanded the program by passing the Chaffee Foster Care Independence Act in 1999 to assist youth who are emancipated while in foster care: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

(1) supports former foster care youth as they overcome many emotional, physical, and social obstacles in the pursuit of healthy, independent, and fulfilling lives;

(2) recognizes former foster care youth organizations for their dedication to reforming and improving the foster care system;

(3) appreciates individuals, mentors, and social workers who provide assistance to former foster care youth beyond resources available through Federal, State, and local services; and

(4) encourages reviews of Federal and State programs conducted under title IV of the Social Security Act that would improve services to help former foster care youth succeed in their transition to adulthood and independence.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. LEWIS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks on H. Res. 1208.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Georgia?

There was no objection.

Mr. LEWIS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise today to ask my colleagues to support House Resolution 1208. This